

February 22, 2010

**Statement by Paul Filson, Director of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Connecticut State Council in favor of HB5022 --AN ACT CONCERNING THE CITIZENS' ELECTION PROGRAM-- before the GAE Committee**

Good morning, Co-Chairs, Senator Slossberg, Representative Spalone and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee - I appreciate the opportunity to be here before you today. My name is Paul Filson and I am Director of SEIU's Connecticut State Council. The State Council represents over 55,000 active members in Connecticut. SEIU is Connecticut's largest union. We represent health care workers, building service workers, state/municipal employees and community college professors and staff. The SEIU State Council whole-heartedly supports public funding of elections and recommends that the General Assembly enact **HB5022** which is designed to preserve Connecticut's landmark clean elections legislation.

SEIU supports **HB5022** that proposes to repeal section 9-717, the reversion clause, and makes several common sense modifications to the Citizen's Election Program. In general, the Citizens' Election Program has been a success. Following the scandals of the Rowland administration Connecticut became a pioneer in taking the corrupting influence of private money out of the system. The 2008 cycle of elections was a success with 75% of all candidates participating in the program. Many candidates that I spoke with in 2008 told me that they would not have run were it not for the program that provided enough money to run competitive campaigns. There were also several competitive primaries that would not have been possible without public money.

Most incumbent candidates who I spoke with also told me how refreshing it was to have a system that relied, not on raising money from PACs and lobbyists, but rather on small contributions from constituents. The beauty of the Citizens' Election Program is that it takes the corrupting influence of special interest money out of the equation for elections. Post election, our representatives do not have to worry about whether or not they can raise easy money from lobbyists and PACs by voting for laws that might offend special interests and thus cut off the flow of money.



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Running an effective campaign these days is not an inexpensive proposition. In addition to pounding the pavement and pressing the flesh, which are free, communicating with voters through mail and radio and even TV is getting more and more expensive. Postage fees are rising yearly and printing costs go up every year. Running an effective campaign depends on getting your message out to voters. The new matching grant provision in **HB5022** replaces the unconstitutional trigger with a supplemental and optional fund raising component open to all candidates in competitive races. The new provision will enable publicly funded candidates to continue raising money against privately funded candidates.

A vibrant democracy depends on an electoral system that is fair and balanced. It depends on competitive campaigns. Democracy must be inclusive and is much more dynamic if anyone who wants to run is able to run – even people of modest means. The old system favored candidates with money and connections.

SEIU does not support reducing the grants to clean elections participants, but recognizes that some of the changes proposed in **HB5022** make some sense. Uncontested and uncompetitive races require less money.

Finally, under the old system, one phone call to a lobbyist could generate thousands of dollars in contributions. I used to get those calls. SEIU and its various locals with PACs could donate much more money than say a small business owner or your neighbor down the street. Even worse, a call to a well connected contract lobbyist could raise nearly every dime you might need to run your campaign. I used to attend fund raisers at restaurants where a dozen people would attend, but magically several dozen checks would appear on the table along with a thick ad book filled with ads from lobbyists and lobbyist clients. That kind of money may have been able to buy more consideration than is proper.

Let's not allow the Citizens' Election Program to die even before it has run through an entire election cycle. Quick action is crucial—campaigning has begun; this year we have elections for Governor and constitutional officers, as well as the second time around for State Representatives and State Senators. It is imperative that these elections are publicly funded with enough money to be effective.